DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 241 TM 032 592

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TITLE Examining the Impact of Service-Learning among Preservice Teachers.
SPONS AGENCY State Univ. of New York, Oneonta. Coll. at Oneonta.
PUB DATE 2001-04-00
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting and Exhibits of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (53rd, Dallas, TX, March 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Psychology; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; *Preservice Teachers; *Service Learning; *Student Attitudes; *Undergraduate Students

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of service learning by integrating service learning into an undergraduate educational psychology course with the course and instructor held constant. The study was designed to assess academic and affective outcomes by combining both qualitative and quantitative measures. Students in two sections of a required course participated in this study. Both sections were taught by the same instructors, but one section (n=27) was required to write two papers based on recent research in the areas of learning and motivation, and the other section (n=16) was required to do a service learning project in a local elementary school working with the children in various capacities. Although the results were not statistically significant, the mean course grade for the service learning group was higher than that of the control group. When affective outcomes were compared, a significant difference was found for civic responsibility. Students' qualitative responses also revealed the positive impact of the service learning activities. (Contains 21 references.) (SLD)

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1

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Paper presented at the 53rd Annual Meeting & Exhibits of American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, March 2001 in Dallas, Texas.

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TM032592

This work has been supported by a Faculty Development Grant awarded by SUNY Oneonta, Fall 2001

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Abstract

In the recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the popularity of service-learning programs across the country. Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents, reports that there are now 575 member campuses participating in Campus Compact, with estimates that about 10,800 faculty members were involved in teaching 11,800 service-learning courses in the most recent survey of members. However, research regarding the influences of service-learning experiences on preservice and beginning teachers is in the early stages. The purpose of the present study is to examine the impact of service-learning by integrating service-learning in an undergraduate Educational Psychology course when the course and the instructor are held constant. It is designed to assess the academic and affective outcomes by combining both qualitative and quantitative measures. Findings are interpreted and implications for further research are discussed.

Introduction

Service learning is a pedagogical model that intentionally integrates academic learning and relevant community service (Howard, 1998). Connecting service directly with academic courses makes it quite different from "volunteer" work that is performed in the community. Properly designed service learning courses relate the community service experience to the course material and require that students reflect on their experiences through writings, discussions, or class presentations (Sax and Astin, 1997). A service learning program integrates service into courses in such a way that service enhances learning and learning enhances service (Furco, 1996). Advocates of service learning argue that community service experiences enhance teaching and learning in all subject areas (Battistoni, 1997; Sax and Astin, 1997). Skeptics, however, ask whether service-learning, although popular with students, has an impact on what students learn (Eyler & Giles, 1999). The purpose of the present study is to examine the impact of service-learning by integrating service-learning in an undergraduate Educational Psychology course when the course and the instructor are held constant. It is designed to assess the academic and affective outcomes by combining both qualitative and quantitative measures.

Theoretical Framework

In the recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the popularity of service-learning programs across the country. Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents, reports that there are now 575 member campuses participating in Campus Compact, with estimates that about 10,800 faculty members were involved in

teaching 11,800 service-learning courses in the most recent survey of members (Campus Compact, 1998).

However, research regarding the influences of service-learning experiences on preservice and beginning teachers is in the early stages (Anderson, 1998). The few studies that have been conducted indicate that service-learning is associated with gains for preservice teachers in the development of professional attitudes and values needed for successful teaching (Root, 1997).

Sullivan (1991) found that preservice teachers who had completed community service internships had a great degree of success in their student teaching experience, noting specifically ease in planning activities, communicating with parents, and using the interpersonal skills necessary to deal effectively with adolescents. Wade (1995) noted an increase in preservice teachers' positive attitudes about community participation, and gains in self-esteem and self-efficacy. Root and Batchelder (1994) concluded that preservice teachers who completed a service-learning class made significant gains in the complexity of their thinking about a social problem of childhood. Seigel (1995) found that teacher education students who completed a community service experience as a part of a course on diversity increased their sensitivity to diversity issues and became more insightful about their own responses to diverse students. Vadeboncoeur, Rahm, Aguilera, LeCompte (1996) identified an increased commitment to social justice and a reduction in teacher biases in teacher education students who completed a service-learning experience. However, no changes were found in students' degree of social activism. Wade (1997) found that service–learning can be a means for empowering student teachers by providing them with authority and affirmation. Perhaps the most difficult

arena has been in the area of intellectual, cognitive, and academic effects (Alt, 1997; Kraft, 1996). In fact a closer look at the research done reveals that little has been directed at academic learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). The few studies that have tried to measure academic learning directly have been narrowly focussed and have used grades to assess the impact of service learning. These studies have yielded mixed results: service-learning did not hurt achievement, but did not always contribute to higher student grades (Miller, 1994; Shastri, 2000). The handful of studies that attempted to go beyond conventional measures of fact acquisition have been limited to small groups or single institutions (Root and Batchelder, 1994). In order for the emphasis on service-learning to be sustained on college campuses, presidents, deans, and faculty need to be convinced that it is an effective process for achieving the most valued academic goals in higher education (Eyler and Giles, 1999). The purpose of the present study is to investigate the impact of service-learning among preservice teachers, specifically in terms of academic and affective outcomes.

Method

Students enrolled in two sections of an upper division required course in "Psychological Foundations of Education" participated in this study conducted in Spring 1999 semester. Both the sections were taught by the same instructor using the traditional expository method combined with class discussions, group activities and video presentations. All students were required to do written assignments and to take periodic quizzes and trimester exams. The only difference was the requirements for the written assignments. One section was required to write two 7 - 10 page papers by reviewing

recent research in the areas of learning and motivation. The other section was required to do a service-learning project. The students were placed in a local elementary school. They were in-service for a minimum of twenty hours engaging in such activities as assisting in after-school programs, field trips, and serving as reading buddies. Additionally, sample reflection opportunities included maintaining a triple-entry reflective journal and turning-in a final reflective paper. A pre and post-test survey designed to measure general attitudes and perceptions in four domain clusters namely academic, civic responsibility, career, and empowerment was also used for both the groups.

Results

The results on the academic and affective outcomes were as follows:

Academic Outcomes : A t-test for independent samples was conducted on the total scores earned on the quizzes, exams, and written assignments: Since the variances of the two groups were the same, a pooled t-test was used. The results were not significant at the .05 probability level. However, the means of the two groups indicated that the service-learning group scored 10 points above the control group. This difference was due to the SL group doing better on the assignments. (Appendix 1)

Affective Outcomes: The pre and post survey results of the SL and the control groups were compared on all the four clusters, namely, academic, civic responsibility, career, and empowerment. A Mann-Whitney test was used to analyse the results. A significant difference was found on one cluster, namely, civic responsibility.

Free Responses: A few of these are quoted below:

"I've learned how a teacher follows guidelines. Also how some students that come from troubled homes need extra help to be able to do well in school."

"The time that I spent as a member of that class enabled me to see the future. It made me realize that I was making the correct choice and that I am going to make a great teacher. I know I still have a lot to learn about becoming a teacher but the feelings that I had as I left each day were powerful . . . I have continued to return to my class even though I have completed my requirement."

Conclusions

Guided by previous research, the present study sought to examine the impact of service-learning by integrating service-learning in an upper division Educational Psychology course when the course and the instructor are held constant. It was designed to assess the academic and affective outcomes by combining both qualitative and quantitative measures. The findings of this study hold at least two implications for structuring service learning projects in Educational Psychology. First it demonstrates that students do benefit more from direct rather than indirect projects. Students who tutor, read or work with children are more likely to learn skills that can be applied to their future teaching. The qualitative responses clearly reveal the positive impact of service-learning. Second, it is possible that the opportunity to reflect on their service activities encourages the students to examine the connections between their service activities and the concepts and theories taught in the classroom. One possible explanation for the lack of significant statistical differences could be the unit of analysis. In the present study the

unit of analysis was the class of students. It is possible that differences noticed among individual students tend to get washed out when we look at classes as a whole.

Appendix

Two Sample t-test for Service-Learning (S-L) vs Control groups

	N	Mean	SD	SE Mean
S-L	16	237.0	17.2	4.3
Control	27	226.1	22.3	4.2

t = .10 p = 0.32

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